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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Liberation, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.15-15441(E)

Please recycle

Childhood in the occupied territories of Western Sahara

Soldiers, police officers, demonstrations and attacks are recurrent themes in Saharawi children's drawings. A child's drawing, as a spontaneous expression, represents a child's thought processes and its perceptions of the world around it.

Fear and sadness which children transmit through their creativity are a reflection on the systematic exposure to violence which the Saharawis are subjected to, particularly during childhood. The conflict has now persisted for over 40 years, meaning that several generations of children have never known peace.

Young people, who constitute a significant proportion of the Saharawi society in the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara, are forced to witness violent encounters on a daily basis which inevitably becomes part of them. Humiliations, detentions and torture are constant in the lives of Saharawis.

Several NGOs have confirmed that the Moroccan authorities detain Saharawis between the ages of 12 -18. Sometimes children are detained for several hours, without informing their parents. Moreover, many detained children are subjected to beatings and psychological torture, including threats of sexual violence. In some instances, children have been abandoned outside of the city, in the desert. Adala UK has informed the United Nations about these events. According to other reports, Moroccan security forces have surrounded schools.

The Moroccan authorities use the rights of Saharawi children as an instrument for extortion and negotiations with Saharawi families who oppose the occupation. All of this robs children of their childhood and forces them to live like adults in a general context of violence and experience things they are not emotionally prepared for. The physical and psychological damage which this causes is difficult to repair.

Saharawi families encounter a lot of difficulties in accessing health services due to the police presence in hospitals and fear that their children could be detained as a result of participating in demonstrations demanding the right to self-determination.

All of these abuses constitute violations of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child from 1959.

Experiences of threats, violence, cruelty, discrimination and humiliation lead to feelings of hatred and aggressiveness in children, which stops them from growing up with dignity and denies them a secure future.

Morocco has been maintaining its brutal occupation of Western Sahara for decades and systematically violates international human rights and UN resolutions as well as international law. All of this is happening with impunity, with the international community turning a blind eye to the illegal practices which the Saharawi people, particularly children, are subjected to.